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Town of Northfield
Board of Selectmen

Memo

To: All Town Officials
From: Selectboard

Date: December 22, 2010

Re: Policies, existing and proposed, for employee and non-employee officials' conduct and guidelines for public involvement at public meetings.

We are presenting this memo with attachments to draw your attention to pre-existing and proposed policies relative to civil behavior in Town Hall among employees, all town officials, and the public.

We hope you will review all of these documents and ask questions should they arise, and let us know your thoughts and recommendations about the two proposed policies below.

Attached to this memo are three documents:

1. From the Town of Northfield Personnel Policy, Sections 5.1 General Conduct and Standards, 5.4 Attendance and Punctuality, and 5.5 Policy Protocol for Dealing with Difficult Customers.
2. Proposed policy: "Public Participation at Town of Northfield Meetings".
3. Proposed policy: "Code of Conduct for Elected and Appointed Officials (Boards, Committees, Officers)".

We genuinely seek your input and will be reviewing any comments and concerns and intend to adopt these policies at our meeting on Tuesday, January 18, 2011. This memo and attached documents will also be posted on the Board of Selectmen page on the town website.

Thank you.

5.1 GENERAL CONDUCT AND STANDARDS - Town employees are expected to act honestly, conscientiously, reasonably and in good faith at all times having regard to their responsibilities, the interests of the Town, and the welfare of its residents. Employees have an obligation to be present at work as required and to be absent from the workplace only with proper authorization; to carry out their duties in an efficient and competent manner, and maintain specified standards of performance; to comply with reasonable employer instructions and policies and to work as directed; to respect the privacy of individuals and use confidential information only for the purposes for which it was intended; to neither use, nor allow the use of Town property, resources, or funds for other than authorized purposes; to incur no liability on the part of the Town without proper authorization; and, to maintain all qualifications necessary for the performance of their duties legally and efficiently.

The intent of this policy is to ensure that: 1) employees meet the Town's legitimate expectations in the areas of performance and behavior; 2) employees whose performance or behaviors are deficient are provided with the necessary assistance and motivation to meet the Town's expectations; and 3) disciplinary action initiated against an employee is fair and appropriate.

Failure to behave in a manner consistent with the standards of conduct and policies included herein may result in disciplinary action being initiated against the offending employee. The Town shall utilize a fair and equitable process in reviewing an employee's alleged violation of these standards and policies and shall discipline the employee, if called for, in a manner appropriate given the alleged violation. May take any or all action deemed appropriate to recover or protect its property.

5.4 ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY - Attendance and punctuality are important factors for an employee's success within the Town. All employees work as a team, and this requires that each person be in the right place at the right time. If an employee is going to be late for work or absent, the employee must notify his or her Department Head as soon as possible before the start of the workday.

Tardiness and failure to report to work are viewed as unacceptable job performance and may be grounds for progressive disciplinary action. If an employee exhibits a pattern of repeated tardiness, he/she may receive an oral reprimand.

Subsequent tardiness may result in a written reprimand or further disciplinary action. If an employee is tardy for more than two (2) consecutive hours without cause, he/she may receive a written reprimand without having received a prior oral reprimand. Subsequent tardiness may result in further disciplinary action.

If an employee does not report for his/her scheduled work hours and fails to notify the Department Head of the absence by the end of the regularly scheduled shift the employee shall be considered on unauthorized leave without pay for the day and may be subject to disciplinary action, unless the absence resulted from emergency. Further incidents of this nature may result in subsequent disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

5.5 POLICY AND PROTOCOL FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT

CUSTOMERS - Like all customers, they serve, Town employees have a right to be treated with respect and courtesy when providing service to their customers. Disrespectful treatment of employees, including raised voices, the use of foul language, rude or insulting remarks, have no place in the workplace, and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Town employees will make every effort to listen to concerns or to address issues being raised by customers, provided these requests are reasonable and made in a calm and rational manner. If a customer begins to exhibit behavior that is disrespectful, abusive or rude, he/she will be advised to cease the activity immediately. If the behavior continues, the employee will call his/her Supervisor or Department Head for assistance, where not available the employee will call the Board of Selectmen. If necessary, the individual will be asked to leave the premises.

Under no circumstances shall an employee be expected to tolerate behavior that is deemed threatening or demeaning, because of tone of voice or language used. If a threat is perceived in a face-to-face situation or the employee fears for his/her safety, the employee or his/her Supervisor or Department Head should contact the Police Department immediately. If irrational or abusive behavior occurs over the telephone, the employee should advise the customer to call back when he/she has had time to cool off, and hang up.

Public Participation at Town Of Northfield Meetings

The Northfield Selectboard welcomes everyone to its meetings and all other public meetings of the Town of Northfield. All regular and special meetings of the boards and committees of the Town of Northfield shall be open to the public and shall conform to the Open Meeting Law. Executive sessions are closed to the public and will be held only as prescribed by the statutes of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We are your elected and appointed officials and we serve as representatives of the community. The Northfield Selectboard believes that community participation is important and vital to its understanding of the views, ideas, and needs of the community. Therefore, we will take steps to inform and to listen.

During meetings of the Selectboard and other town boards and committees, all attempts will be made to find a balance between hearing from members of the community and conducting required business. In order to achieve this objective, the following rules and procedures are established for the Selectboard and other town board and committee meetings:

1. The Chair shall preside over the meeting. In this role, s/he will acknowledge speakers from the public. S/he will determine the length of time for public participation and ensure that comments are appropriate. During any part of the meeting, the public may be recognized by the Chair to speak on an item before the board or committee. All remarks will be addressed through the Chair of the meeting rather than directly to other participants.
2. At the start of each regularly scheduled meeting, individuals, or group representatives will be invited to address the meeting during the Public Comment period. Public Comment is the time for the public to bring up something not already on the agenda. In general, it is a time for us to listen, to acknowledge, to clarify, and, possibly, to direct your concern/issue to the appropriate place. It is not a time for lengthy discussion. The Chair will determine the length of the Public Comment period given the urgency and relevancy of the items raised, the number of other speakers and the length of items on the agenda. The Chair, in conjunction with the Committee, will determine an appropriate time to revisit the concerns/issues raised by the public.
3. Comments made by anyone at the meeting should at all times be respectful. If a speaker persists in improper conduct or remarks, the Chair may rescind the individual's right to address the committee. Defamatory or abusive remarks are always out of order.
4. Speakers may offer such objective criticisms of town operations and programs as concern them, but in public session the Committee will not hear personal complaints about town personnel. Under most circumstances, administrative channels are the proper means for disposition of legitimate complaints involving town employees.
5. The Selectboard and other town boards and committees will provide information to the public at the meeting to help them participate in an informed manner. This will include providing copies of the agenda and materials to be discussed. Since not all materials are easily reproduced and public attendance will vary, the number of documents provided for the public should be reasonable. Minutes of the meetings shall be maintained as required and available to the public. Again, welcome.

Notices of meetings and meeting agendas are posted in the Town Hall by the Town Clerk; are listed in "The Recorder" newspaper on Saturdays and on the Town of Northfield website (www.northfield.ma.us). Meeting minutes can be obtained from the Town Clerk once they have been filed with the Clerk's office by the board or committee.

Code of Conduct for Elected and Appointed Officials (Boards, Committees, Officers)

All town officials are expected to conduct themselves as follows:

1. Commit to following the mission and purposes of the Office, Board, or Committee they serve as defined in federal and state laws and regulations, local bylaws and regulations, and town policies.
2. Be well-informed about the duties and responsibilities of the office.
3. Keep in mind that you represent the town in your conduct as a public official and that your role is service to the town as a whole and not an opportunity to benefit politically or personally from your service.
4. Abide by the Massachusetts Ethics Law (c.268A), the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, and Massachusetts Public Records laws and regulations.
5. Refrain from making statements or promises about your position and/or how you plan to vote on matters that will come before you as an official, before you and other board or committee members, have had an opportunity to hear all sides of the issue during a public meeting of your board or committee. Make decisions only after all the facts or information have been presented and discussed.
6. Work in a spirit of cooperation and respect with fellow board members, other town officials, and members of the public in light of the likelihood of differences of opinion.
7. As a member of a multi-member body (i.e., committee, board), abide by decisions/votes of the body.
8. Refrain from public criticism of town employees. Concerns about staff performance should be addressed through proper channels (e.g., the appointing or supervisory authority) and as detailed in the town's Personnel Policy.
9. In the event you can no longer fulfill your duties on a regular basis or anticipate absence in attendance at regular meetings of the board you serve, thereby impeding the conduct of business of that board, tender your resignation to the appointing authority and/or the Town Clerk.